



Guide to Supporting Multiprofessional Trainees when a Concern is Raised





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Introduction

All of us are likely to experience periods of difficulty at some point in our own careers. One starting point when faced with a multiprofessional trainee* requiring support is to consider the type of support and guidance you might want if you were in the same situation.

Reaching out can be challenging, such is the deep stigma and embarrassment felt by those struggling. It is also a common myth that a multiprofessional trainee will complain about you if you raise a concern about them. This is very rare. If you have established trust early on, and feedback with kindness and support, the multiprofessional trainee will almost always be grateful.

This document aims to give guidance on the early management and support of multiprofessional trainees about whom there may be concern. It has been produced for use by Heads of School and Training Programme Directors, although we hope that it will be a useful reference for all educators supervising our multiprofessional trainees.

** The Professional Support and Wellbeing Service offers assistance to postgraduate doctors, dentists, pharmacists and public health clinicians who are referred to as multiprofessional trainees in this document.*

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Recognising Concerns

Early recognition of problems, appropriate intervention with effective feedback and support for both multiprofessional trainee and trainer are most likely to be successful. In each case, thorough and careful investigation is essential to determine the nature of the problem and identify underlying factors before appropriate action can be taken.

Difficulties usually present as performance issues, and less commonly, conduct concerns, the range of which can be considerable. The multiprofessional trainee may develop work-related health issues, which may be compounded by other factors. More often than not, there is a complex inter-play between several factors which underlie the concern. These may include:

- Personal circumstances
- Health
- Burnout
- Protected or non-protected characteristics (such as neurodivergence or being new to UK medical practice)
- Issues with the learning environment
- Potential initial triggers raising concern

Initial concerns are as likely to be apparent to nursing and other clinical staff, other multiprofessional trainees or senior grade doctors/dentists as they are to the multiprofessional trainees Clinical or Educational Supervisor. However, it may be difficult for peers or other colleagues to take any action if there is not a clear and confidential channel of communication available. Initial triggers for raising concerns may include:

- Patterns and repetition rather than one-off incidents
- Sudden, 'out of character' behaviour with no obvious explanation
- Higher than expected levels of sickness
- Clinical concerns such as slow work rate, poor knowledge or decision-making
- Minor concerns raised as a conduct issue e.g. selective leave-taking, small lies

It is important to have clear and fair processes for staff to feed back about all multiprofessional trainees in the department. This might include regular meetings with the senior nurse to get feedback about all multiprofessional trainees or having a single person to whom any concerns can be raised.



THINK

Is the concern fair and objective?

You will need to be alert to the possibility that the multiprofessional trainee is being singled out unfairly. This is more likely to be the case if the multiprofessional trainee has one or more protected (or non-protected) characteristic. Examples include:

- Having neurodivergent traits
- Being an international graduate, especially if new to the UK
- LGBTQ+
- Working less than full time (LTFT)
- Being from a less-privileged background
- Having a long-term health condition with reasonable adjustments, for example no on-call

Having intersectional characteristics, such as being an ethnic minority woman, or a neurodivergent gay man, will create even higher risk.

Beware of a 'story' arising around a particular multiprofessional trainee, whereby many people seem to have opinions, which seem to be self-perpetuating.

Indicators of this include:

- Reports of behaviour not personally witnessed by the person reporting them
- Opinions not consistent with evidence, or a lack of evidence to support the opinion
- The same story being reported by multiple people ("the rumour mill")
- Conflicting opinions

You may also hear comments displaying common biases such as fundamental attribution bias (a judgement is attached to the individual rather than the behaviour). An example might be, "He is lazy," rather than, "he does not see as many patients in clinic as his peers," or "he regularly arrives 10 minutes late for clinic." The latter comments make it easier for you to feedback constructively and fairly to the multiprofessional trainee, to find out what the underlying reason is, and provide the right support.

The fact that a report comes from a colleague who you trust and/or like, does not mean the report is unaffected by bias. In the same way, it is important for you to check yourself for any bias in your response to hearing the concern.





Initial Response to a Concern

It is essential to approach any concerns with a compassionate and inclusive leadership style. NHS England North West has produced some excellent guidance: [The L.O.T.U.S Compassionate Leadership Framework and Toolkit](#).

When you become aware of an initial concern, you should arrange a meeting with the multiprofessional trainee as soon as possible. The conversation should be somewhere that ensures confidentiality, and where you won't be interrupted. Concerns should be fed back in a compassionate way, using the evidence reported, and describing behaviours or actions. The multiprofessional trainee then needs time to formulate a response. You will need to keep an open mind and employ active listening techniques. Assume the multiprofessional trainee is telling the truth as they see it.

At this stage, you will have a good idea whether there is a genuine basis for the concern (it is possible that the multiprofessional trainees account reveals a simple misunderstanding). The multiprofessional trainee may have a good understanding themselves of what the reasons are, but they may need a bit of support to establish what is underlying the issue. They may have a good idea, but be anxious about sharing (for example, disclosing a diagnosis of ADHD).

It can be helpful to think of possible factors which may influence the development of a concern under three headings:

- Personal circumstances
- Personal characteristics
- Work circumstances

Factors to Consider

Personal Circumstances

Difficult personal circumstances are common and may be short term or longer term. Examples include:

- Being new to the UK
- Mental or physical health condition
- Carer responsibility
- Recent bereavement
- Family member ill health
- Long commute
- Working less than full time (LTFT)
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic abuse and/or violence
- Financial worries
- Addiction
- Poor sleep or other aspects of self-care/wellbeing





Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics are part of an individual's core identity and may be protected under the Equality Act 2010 or non-protected. As such they should be recognised, where known, and valued by all members of the team. However, it is important to understand that such characteristics are frequently a source of discrimination and exclusion. Multiple experiences of this nature can have profound and wide-ranging impacts on an individual. No two people will have the same experience, or the same response to a similar experience.

It can be very helpful for a multiprofessional trainee to be able to talk about their experiences and be believed. Whilst it may feel tempting to minimise or excuse the behaviour which has caused these experiences, either because you know the person involved, or through a wish to reduce the distress, this will usually make the multiprofessional trainee feel worse. If a multiprofessional trainee reports this type of experience, it is an expression of trust, and it is important to respond in a compassionate and non-judgemental manner.

Examples include:

- International graduate
- Ethnic minority
- Disability or long-term health condition
- Older age
- Religious minority - especially if visible indicator such as a hijab
- Female
- Neurodivergent (e.g. autism, ADHD)
- Pregnancy, parental or adoption leave
- LGBTQ+
- From a less-advantaged background (e.g. first in family to go to university)

Work Circumstances

Workplaces are rarely perfect, and it is important to consider how issues in the workplace may be affecting performance or health, including:

- Lack of training opportunities
- Excessive workload
- Lack of supportive supervision
- Failure to feedback appropriately
- Discrimination, exclusion, microaggressions (from staff or patients)
- Bullying or undermining
- Unsupportive rotas
- Poor culture in department
- Lack of support after incident/complaint

As previously mentioned, there is often a complex interplay of these factors. To take the example of a GP trainee who is new to the UK and placed in an acute specialty for their first placement. The GP trainee will have all the stresses associated with migration - leaving family and friends, finding housing, financial worries, and adjusting to the culture and language. In addition, they are working outside their chosen specialty, having to navigate all the complexities of the NHS, and frequently deal with stereotyping, microaggressions and



exclusion. It's easy to see how problems occur, and how vital it is for supervision to be supportive, holistic and compassionate.

Ensuring Multiprofessional Trainee Wellbeing

These are often not easy conversations for either yourself or the multiprofessional trainee. Therefore, it is important to have established a trusting relationship with your multiprofessional trainee, ideally before any problems have come to light.

If the multiprofessional trainee has had difficult experiences previously, they will find it more difficult to trust you. On the other hand, if they feel that you are genuinely interested in all aspects of their lives, and that you are there to support them, whatever happens, trust can be built up. When there is trust, you will be able to give the challenging feedback in a way that lets you both focus on support and solutions.

It is also important to understand what a difficult experience this will be for the multiprofessional trainee, and to remind them of their strengths, as well as emphasising that you will work with them to come up with solutions.

Even if the concern seems minor to you, the multiprofessional trainee may be severely affected by the feedback. This is especially likely if they:

- Are from a marginalised group
- Have previously had difficult experiences of feedback
- Have not received 'negative' feedback before
- Are being bullied
- Have low self-esteem
- Poor mental or physical health
- Difficult personal circumstances
- Emotional dysregulation (e.g. in ADHD)

Multiprofessional trainees do not always respond outwardly in the same way, and you may not know what they are feeling, or the underlying factors. It is therefore important to ask explicitly how they are feeling and make empathic comments if they are obviously upset or angry. Have tissues available.

- Have a low threshold for offering a referral to occupational health.
- Remember an initial response which is defensive does not mean the multiprofessional trainee lacks insight - it can just be a normal human reaction. They may need time and support to reflect on the situation, so you can both agree on an action plan.
- It may be necessary to have more than one meeting with the multiprofessional trainee, especially if they are struggling. It is more important to do things properly than quickly.



Pastoral Support

- Try to avoid having these conversations on a Friday afternoon.
- Check that the multiprofessional trainee has someone they can speak to outside of the immediate work environment - it may be worth involving the Wellbeing TPD if you have access to one or identifying a suitable mentor.
- If further meetings are required, check whether the multiprofessional trainee would like to have someone with them.
- Check the Lead Employer website for resources and sources of support
- If you have a concern that the multiprofessional trainee may be having suicidal thoughts, you should ask them about this.

PLEASE NOTE: Asking someone if they are considering suicide or are currently suicidal will not incite suicidal intentions. It is well evidenced that it is a protective factor to be asked this question, but a common misconception is that you can cause unwarranted harm.

REMEMBER

- Do not minimise or underestimate the importance of early signs.
- Ask yourself what the signs are. It is better to start with the evidence, rather than seeking out evidence to justify a feeling.
- Problems can arise at any time, for any multiprofessional trainee, and can usually be rectified with supportive intervention.
- Acting early when a problem arises could rescue rather than destroy a career.

Recording Information

Once a concern has been raised it is vital that detailed factual records are kept from the beginning of the process to support action which may need to be taken as the case progresses. This can take the form of:

- The multiprofessional trainees e-portfolio
- Own notes of meetings or discussion with colleagues relating to the trainee
- Own notes of meetings or discussions with the trainee
- Documents produced by other colleagues

An initial fact-finding internal review should take place to gather all relevant information by the referrer i.e. the Training Programme Director / Foundation Programme Director who has the concerns. This information should be documented as above. If performance is normally good, a change in health, personal circumstances or environmental factors should be





considered. Consideration as to whether the problem is a health, conduct, performance (or multiple issues) should be undertaken.

- Document concerns raised in a factual and contemporaneous manner
- This can help inform further intervention and act as an aide memoir for the future
- Remember, any written documents are disclosable

Should a referral to Deans Case Management be required, refer to the [Deans Case Management Referral Guidance](#).